

LIFT HIGH THE CROSS

Last Sunday, our Entrance or Processional hymn was ***Lift High the Cross***; this Sunday, September 3, we sing these same glorious strains as our Recessional or Sending hymn. Both processions are led by the crucifer, lifting high the cross, as we begin and end our worship service.

The Anglican and Lutheran Churches historically have elaborate and colorful processions, particularly on major feast days. Clergy, altar servers and worship assistants, often arrayed in robes of the liturgical color of the season, follow the crucifer who carries the large cross from the narthex to the altar at the start of the worship service and, again from the altar to the narthex at the conclusion of the worship service. This ritual use of the cross is a sign of the victory of the resurrection and finds a biblical basis in John 12:32, "And I, when I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself".

Some of our favorite hymns were composed with processionals in mind. "***Lift High the Cross***" a 19th Century English hymn written by George Kitchin is one such hymn. He wrote the hymn for a festival service inaugurating an important mission organization, the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel, held in Winchester Cathedral in 1887 when he was Dean of the Cathedral. The original hymn text was altered by Anglican priest Michael Robert Newbolt (1874-1956), who later became Canon of Chester Cathedral, and was first printed in 1916 in the *Supplement to Hymns Ancient and Modern*.

It has been suggested that the hymn was inspired by a story of the Emperor Constantine's vision as told in Eusebius's *Life of Constantine*, in which he saw a cross inscribed with the words, "In hoc signo vinces" ("in this sign [of the cross] you will conquer"). In the early 4th Century, Constantine recognized Christianity officially as a religion of the state, providing a basis for further spread of Christianity.

The 1916 edition of "***Lift High the Cross***" was set to the tune "*Crucifier*" by Sydney Nicholson. Every great processional hymn must have stirring music. Sir Sydney Nicholson (1875-1947) was the chief music advisor for the publication *The Supplement to Hymns Ancient and Modern* which included the hymn text for *Lift High the Cross*. Nicholson's tune *Crucifer* showed a fine sense of the potential of the lyrics with the relatively subdued melody of the verses contrasting with the spectacular refrain.

In looking at the meaning of the hymn text, some scholars say the cross references the crucifixion, while others contend that the cross is a metaphor for the resurrection. These conflicting opinions cause me to reflect on what my assumptions have been and on why I find this hymn to be so moving. There are two big ideas that swirl through my heart and soul when I hear "***Lift High the Cross.***" First, is the majestic and triumphant tone of the music. Second are those opening four words, "lift high the cross." It is a celebration while at the same time a calling forth or a challenge—to lift high the cross. With this hymn my mind goes towards the same question--does my life "lift high the cross?"

This hymn invites us to look up to the cross, the symbol of Christ's redeeming love. It suggests that our individual lives are part of a great procession of believers, throughout history and into the future. And that we proclaim Christ's love "till all the world adore his sacred name." Will you join this great procession?

Lift High the Cross
The love of Christ Proclaim.
Till all the world
Adore His sacred name

Join us Sunday for worship at 10 AM and enjoy food and fellowship at a Labor Day Cookout following the service